The Work-Life Continuum

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The main topics addressed in the article are:

Introduction

The process to moving beyond policies and programs to cultural change takes time, energy and patience. To effect culture change, you need to consider individuals, groups of employees, managers and the workforce collectively. You need to have a sense of where your strongest support is (position or level, work unit, leader, etc.) and build from that point. You will also need to address a variety of opinions and concerns, a variety of expectations and expressed needs.

Work-Life Harmony Enterprises describes the work-life culture change using an organizational continuum with five developmental milestones: InActive, ReActive, Active, ProActive and InterActive. The work-life continuum and its milestones or stages are identified by criteria listed in the table below . Organizations may use it as an assessment tool to determine where they are at along the continuum. The table may also be used to determine where they would like the organization to be and to develop a strategic work plan to achieve that objective.

Step One – The Continuum as an Assessment Tool

Determine where you are at along the continuum. Look under each heading; find the words that best describe your beliefs and actions. For example,

- if you or your HR department is currently working on the development of supportive policies (e.g., flexible work arrangements, job-sharing or telework)
- if you already have some programs in place (Employee assistance program, childcare referral service, fitness facility or subsidized cafeteria);
- if your Human Resource department has identified work-life issues as a priority;
- if your current focus is on family needs (childcare, eldercare); and
- if you have included work-life issues in a employee survey or if you have conducted any formal research into the issues (participated in an external study, held focus groups etc).

Then you are, like most organizations in the second phase of the ReActive Stage. (Note: If you are in a transitional phase – moving along the continuum, you may have reached some of the milestones in the next stages)

You may be in a different stage than the rest of the organization. After it is clear where you fit along the continuum, determine where the human resources department is at and determine where your leadership and managers are at along the continuum.

You may find that your front line supervisors are very aware of the issues and supportive of employees' needs. They may be farther along the continuum – others may still see work and family as separate issues and remain firmly in the InActive Stage.

The farther apart along the continuum or the more diverse your workforce is, the more challenging it will be for you to facilitate cultural change.

Step Two – The Continuum as a Planning Tool

Determine where you would like the organization to be and develop a strategic work plan to achieve that objective.

For example, if you are firmly and consistently at the second phase of the ReActive Stage you may want to target having 85% of your organization at the Active Stage by the end of the next fiscal year. To achieve that goal

- you will need to position your initiatives as an organizational competitive imperative and as a strategic business issue, so you will link your work-life initiatives to your recruitment and retention strategies, your business development goals and your organizational development initiatives;

- you may expand your programs to include the full life cycle and include all personal responsibilities such as education and career development, caring for aging relatives, ill, injured or disabled family members;

- you may enhance your policies (e.g., extend leave options beyond maternity leave to include family leave, education leave and/or personal leave);

- you may establish a multi-disciplinary task force to monitor and expand existing programs and policies, and to evaluate progress;

- you may join external councils, committees or consortiums to benchmark your progress and learn form other's experience; and

- you may develop metrics and measurements to hold individuals and managers accountable for creating supportive work environments such as including work-life balance and wellness in measurement tools (e.g., Balanced Score Card, 360O Feedback, Manager performance evaluations, team assessments, bonus and reward strategies etc.).

  It is important to remember that once an organization has "reached" a particular milestone, it doesn't necessarily stay there for long. If there are organizational changes, restructuring, or economic changes, a company may move along the continuum in either direction. If you experience some slippage – don't get discouraged, you will probably regain your positive momentum before too long. If you experience progress don't let up the pressure, continue to monitor your growth and development, keep up with what is happening in regard to work-life balance.

The Work-Life Development Continuum

INACTIVE		
	Family	Family Forgetful
	Approach	None
	Perception	Personal Issue
	Responsibilities	Work Responsibilities
	Action	None
	Focus	Work and family segregation

REACTIVE		
	Family	Family Aware
	Approach	Phase 1. Programmatic Phase 2. Policy
	Perception	Phase 1. Women's Issue Phase 2. HR Issue
	Responsibilities	Phase 1. Child-Care Needs Phase 2. Family Needs
	Action	Phase 1. Some informal investigation research Phase 2. Formal needs assessments
	Focus	Work and family interference, role overload

ACTIVE		
	Family	Family Friendly
	Approach	Phase 1. Organizational Phase 2. Strategic
	Perception	Phase 1. Competitive Issue Phase 2. Business Issue
	Responsibilities	Phase 1. Life Cycle & Personal Responsibilities Phase 2. Multiple/Complex Responsibilities
	Action	Phase 1. Task Force, Departmental Assignement & Accountability Benchmarking Phase 2. Integrated assessments and opinion surveys
	Focus	Work and family balance

PROACTIVE	Family	Family Supportive
	Approach	Cultural change
	Perception	Economic Issue
	Responsibilities	Shared Responsibility
	Action	Influential research; impact assessments
	Focus	Work and life integration

INTERACTIVE	Family	Family Advocate
	Approach	Integrated
	Perception	Social & Economic Issue
	Responsibilities	Collective Responsibility
	Action	Applied collaborative research
	Focus	Work, family, life harmony